

News from Ed Markey

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REPS. MARKEY, SHAYS INTRODUCE BILL TO CLOSE AIR CARGO SECURITY LOOPHOLE

Failure to inspect air cargo creates dangerous security risks

Washington, DC: Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA) and Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT), senior members of the House Committee on Homeland Security, today introduced H.R. 2044, the Air Cargo Security Act, which requires all cargo carried on passenger and all-cargo carriers to be physically inspected before being loaded onboard. While passengers and their luggage are inspected down to their fingernail clippers, almost none of the cargo transported on these aircraft is currently inspected for explosives or other dangerous materials. Terrorists have already exploited the cargo loophole on passenger aircraft, and information uncovered by the 9/11 Commission indicated that Al Qaeda operative Zacharias Moussaoui's terrorist plans included "buying four tons of ammonium nitrate for bombs to be planted on cargo planes." Ammonium nitrate is the same chemical compound used by Timothy McVeigh in the Oklahoma City bombing.

"Three and a half years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it is unacceptable that freight stored in the cargo bay beneath passengers' feet is almost never inspected for bombs that could bring down the plane. Passengers empty their pockets, take off their shoes, and walk through security checkpoints while cargo is placed on the very same planes without being inspected. Moreover, almost none of the cargo transported on all-cargo carriers is physically inspected. We know that Al Qaeda continues to put aircraft near the top of its terrorist target list. The cargo loophole presents a dangerous opportunity for terrorists determined to strike our country, and we must take action to close it immediately," said Rep. Markey.

"During a July 2003 hearing of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, I was surprised to learn that approximately 22 percent of all cargo transported by air travels on passenger flights and is not being screened for explosives. If we are not screening all the baggage and cargo on passenger planes, then we are once again giving the American people a false sense of security. This legislation will ensure all the cargo on passenger planes is inspected, ensuring the safety of our passengers," said Rep. Shays.

H.R. 2044, endorsed by the 22,000-member Coalition of Airline Pilots Association, applies to cargo carried on both passenger planes and aircraft that transport only cargo. It would impose measures to strengthen air cargo security, including:

- A mandate that the Secretary of Homeland Secretary establish systems to inspect cargo using equipment, technology and personnel that meet, at a minimum, the same standards established to inspect passenger baggage;
- Establishment of a system of regular inspection of shipping facilities for shipments of cargo to ensure that appropriate security controls and systems are observed, both at facilities inside the U.S. and abroad; and
- Creation of a training and evaluation program for cargo handlers to improve the security and ensure that cargo is safeguarded from security breaches.

The House voted overwhelmingly by a vote of 278 to 146 for an amendment offered by Rep. Markey and Rep. Shays to the FY04 Homeland Security Appropriations bill to require inspection of 100 percent of the cargo carried on passenger planes (Roll Call 308, June 24, 2003). As a result of strong opposition from the Bush Administration, the Senate dropped the provision from the final version of the spending bill. Last year, the amendment was narrowly defeated after objections from the airline industry (Roll Call 273, June 18, 2004).

"Un-inspected cargo is a clear and present danger to our aviation system. This unacceptable security risk should be immediately remedied to protect passengers, crew members, and all Americans who could be victimized by another terrorist attack using a passenger or cargo aircraft," Rep. Markey concluded.

For more information on Rep. Markey's work to close loopholes in our homeland security laws check out: <http://www.house.gov/markey/>